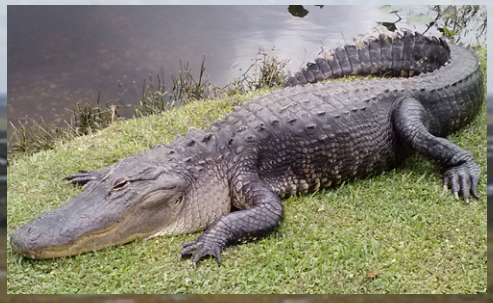
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Federal Lands Transportation Program

The Tamiami Trail Modifications: Next Steps Project



Above: The Tamiami Trail looking east, with the Water Conservation Areas to the north, and Everglades National Park to the south. (NPS photo)

Inset: A common resident of the Everglades: the American Alligator

Mega-Project* Profile: The Tamiami Trail Modifications: Next Steps Project

Estimated cost: $285 million (preliminary 2010 estimate)

Percentage of SER's FLTP Annual Allotment: 833%

Percentage of NPS FLTP Annual Allotment: 119%

Eliminating Barriers To Water Flow. The Tamiami Trail (U.S. Highway 41) has long been recognized as one of the primary barriers to flow of water through the ecosystem.

The need to eliminate barriers to overland flow of water in the Everglades is considered one of the indisputable tenets of restoration. Much scientific information amassed in recent decades reinforces the importance of removing these barriers to water flow in order to restore natural marsh connectivity.

In 2009, Congress authorized implementation of the plan selected in the 2008 Modified Water Deliveries to Everglades National Park, Tamiami Trail Modifications, Limited Reevaluation Report (LRR).

The 2008 LRR plan consists of a one-mile bridge and road improvements to allow the increase in water levels in the adjacent canal to be raised from the current 7.5 feet to 8.5 feet. The LRR plan would improve potential marsh connectivity, reduce sharp changes in water velocity, and improve rainy season depths and durations.

In addition, these modifications will improve the ridge and slough landscape and fish productivity, which could result in increased foraging success for wading birds.

Additional Bridging For The Trail. The LRR Plan is acknowledged as only a first step in the modifications to Tamiami Trail needed for full restoration of natural water conditions in Everglades National Park.

In recognition of this, the 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act directed the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the National Park Service (NPS) to evaluate the feasibility of additional bridging for the Tamiami Trail necessary to improve the ecological connectivity within the remaining natural Everglades, including Everglades National Park and the State of Florida Water Conservation Areas.

The Act further directed that the evaluation recommend a plan to achieve more natural water flow and habitat restoration within the Everglades. The NPS initiated a study that culminated in a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Tamiami Trail Modifications: Next Steps Project.

Analysis. The NPS initiated an analysis to determine how much additional bridging was needed, and the associated benefits and impacts with six alternatives that were evaluated. The analysis looked at eight

factors: marsh connectivity, marsh water velocity, re-connection of the ridge and slough landscape, vehicular wildlife mortality, preservation of cultural resources, and wetland loss. There was a strong positive correlation between the amount of bridge span and the benefits provided, culminating in the selection of Alternative 6E as the preferred alternative.

Top: The Everglade Snail Kite, one of the endangered species that will be helped by the Tamiami Trail project. (NPS photo)

Bottom: Artist's rendition showing the proposed 2.6-mile bridge on the Tamiami Trail. (NPS graphic)

* Mega Projects: The NPS transportation system is supported, in part, by funds from the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP). Currently, the NPS is authorized an annual budget of $268 million from the FLTP. These funds are apportioned by formula among the seven NPS Regions. Most of these funds are used for "transportation asset management" – that is, to pay for the work required to keep existing assets in good condition. There are some projects, such as a major bridge repair or ship replacement, that require a much larger amount of funding than is available on an annual basis to a Region. These we call "Mega Projects." The NPS is pursuing strategies to fund these projects.

In December 2011, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012, which authorized construction of the preferred alternative: the construction of four bridges with a combined length of 5.5 miles. In combination with the 1-mile bridge, currently under construction, these bridges will total 6.5 miles of bridges within the 10.7-mile Tamiami Trail corridor.

This level of bridging will eliminate historical hydrologic constraints and allow for more natural sheet flow patterns, improving ecological conditions throughout much of the southern Everglades, including the Water Conservation Areas and Everglades National Park.

In addition, the remaining 5.2 miles of roadway in the 10.7-mile corridor of the Tamiami Trail will be raised to allow water level increases in the adjacent L-29 Canal consistent with the 9.7-foot design high water. This level of road elevation precludes the need for any future modifications to the highway corridor when full restoration of the Everglades is achieved through the addition of projects supplying sufficient flow of clean water.

The increased water volumes and flow distributions will reestablish the seasonal water depths and flooding durations that are critical to the survival of fish and wildlife species, including many endangered species.

Future Funding. If the Tamiami Trail Modifications: Next Steps project is funded and implemented in conjunction with other planned restoration projects, ecological connectivity between the marshes located in the Water Conservation Areas and Everglades National Park will be substantially improved.

The increased water volumes and improved flow distributions will reestablish seasonal water depths and flooding durations that are critical to the survival of many fish and wildlife species, including the federally endangered Wood Stork, Everglade Snail Kite, and Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow, and state listed Roseate Spoonbill.

Next Steps Project – Design and Construction. The National Park Service has developed a three-phased approach for implementation of the Tamiami Trail Modification Next Steps project based on maximizing early benefits to the park, reducing costs, and ensuring compatibility with other restoration projects in the Everglades.

The FEIS for this project determined that construction of the 2.6-mile bridge located in the westernmost portion of the 10.7-mile corridor would provide greater environmental benefit per mile. Therefore, Phase 1 consists of the westernmost bridge, with decreasing priority moving east along the 10.7-mile corridor.

The design-build package for Phase 1 should be ready by June 2014 to award a construction contract by late September 2014, dependent upon available funding.

The eastern bridge approach of the 2.6-mile bridge will be located just west of the Airboat Association, and the western bridge approach will begin 1/2-mile east of the Osceola Camp.

The bridge would be constructed approximately 50 feet south of the centerline of the existing roadway to maintain motor vehicle traffic during bridge construction.